

JUNE 12, 1980

Before the first rain fell in mid-May, cattle in West Texas had gone as far as they were going without a move to either new grass or new ownership. Sacked goods were no longer sustaining them; hay was too high to feed on a falling cattle market. The winter game plan was over. We were all just fooling ourselves into staying for more.

I am sure I don't need to tell you that drouths are the worst catastrophes that hit the hollow-horn fraternity. A drouth can't be outrun or out fed. Range experts don't outsmart one and the banker hasn't been born can write demand notes fast enough to cover the action.

Hundreds of solutions have been tried to soften the blows of dry weather. Velvet beans have been strewn on the dry ground and molasses has been dripped from barrels on dead stubble. Mesquite trees were pulverized for protein and since immemorial man has burned the spines from cactus and tried every known plant to keep his stock alive. But in spite of his ingenuity and determination, he has been whipped to the dust only to regain his stance after the rains fell.

In the dry scourge of the '50s I found out why our ranch's cattle were so hard to keep alive. We have a strain of Black Angus that go back to a Scottish sire called "Mammoth Eater the 21st." He descended from a herd of hat baler cows that stripped and devoured a principle portion of the highlands and moors of the islands in the 15th century.

Mammoth Eater the 21st was owned by a big landowner, Prince Slothinbowl of the House of Trench Platter. The fame and misfortune of his gluttonous herd was so widespread that vast sums of money were raised by public subscription to sterilize these cattle before all of Scotland was reduced to bare ground.

As the story goes, the Prince, being a glutton himself, took to the battlefield and fought by lance and sword to preserve a herd that was later thought to be the beginning of the dominant stomach gene in all black cattle.

Faced by that information, I have spent 30 years trying to change the appetite of our cattle from grass to meat. Gradually I have added meat scraps and bone meal to the protein ration in hopes the cattle could be switched from cereal grains to, say, jackrabbit or ground squirrel meat.

Though I have failed, I think you will agree that cattle raising in the arid climate of the Shortgrass Country will never be profitable as long as grass is the basic diet of a cow brute. The land does not produce enough forage for the squirrels and the rabbits, much less a 900-pound cow. Man has made great strides in other fields. I think converting a cow to a carnivore not to mention the advantages of herd control by cannibalism, would help feed the hungry world.

Go ahead and scoff, if you please. It's your right to disagree. But remember how the cow business has been working for the past 500 years. My cow of the future will not depend on rains or be cursed by market runs. The self destructing meat eater breed will not produce heifer calf gluts or steer production problems. She'll be a self regulating beast that supports her own in her own way. If you don't understand that advantage, you never have owned enough cattle to know what I'm talking about anyway.

We are starting to see a change in the cattle. This spring the cows cleaned up every fresh lamb tail that fell from the marking pen. It's going to take time to breed away

from that Scottish bull. Don't expect me to ever fight for an old cow as hard as Prince Slothinbowl did.